

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

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INFO AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 5151

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SY, LE

SUBJ: SHIHABI'S COMMENTS ON SYRIAN MEDIATION IN LEBANON

1. SUMMARY: SHIHABI SEES NO EARLY PROSPECT FOR
IMPROVEMENT IN LEBANESE SITUATION. SARG IS USING
LUCIEN DAHDAH TO GET NEW "IDEAS" TO FRANGIEH. END SUMMARY.

2. IN DECEMBER 24 MEETING, I ASKED COS SHIHABI
TO COMMENT ON SYRIAN MEDIATION IN LEBANON, IN LIGHT
OF HIS OWN TWO DAYS OF CONTACTS IN BEIRUT DEC 19-20
AND KARAME'S DECEMBER 22 VISIT TO DAMASCUS. I
NOTED THAT BEIRUT SOURCES HAD ADVISED OUR EMBASSY
THAT SYRIANS WERE PUSHING A THREE-POINT PROGRAM:

A. IMPLEMENTATION OF EFFECTIVE CEASE FIRE;

B. INCREASE THE LEBANESE CABINET TO INCLUDE
REPS OF PHALANGE AND JUMBLATT;

C. IMPLEMENTATION OF MINOR REFORMS NOW WITH
PROMISE OF MORE GENERAL REFORMS

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FOLLOWING ELECTION OF NEW LEBANESE PRESIDENT.

NO, THE GENERAL RESPONDED. HE HAD TAKEN NO SYRIAN PLAN WITH HIM TO BEIRUT. THE ONLY SYRIAN "PLAN" COMMUNICATED TO LEBANESE HAD BEEN WHEN HE WAS LAST IN BEIRUT WITH KHADDAM DURING SEPTEMBER. THEY HAD THEN SPOKEN OF POINT A (EFFECTIVE CEASE FIRE) BUT BEYOND THAT HAD ONLY URGED THAT THE "DIALOGUE COMMITTEE" GET ON WITH BUSINESS OF POLITICAL RECONCILIATION.

2. THE TWO MOST DEPRESSING CONVERSATIONS HE HAD HAD LAST WEEKEND HAD BEEN WITH FRANGIEH AND CHAMOUN. NEITHER, HE ASSERTED, HAD ANY COMPREHENSION OF THE DESTRUCTION LEBANON WAS UNDERGOING AND THE UNDERLYING REASONS FOR CONTINUED VIOLENCE. BOTH MEN ASKED RHETORICALLY, "HOW LEBANON COULD BE ANY BETTER? IT HAS FINE ROADS, GOOD WATER SYSTEM, FREEDOM OF SPEECH AND POLITICAL ASSEMBLY. SOCIALISM MAY BE VERY WELL FOR SYRIA BUT IT IS NOT LEBANON'S PATH."

3. AFTER INITIALLY DENYING THAT HE SAW ANY EARLY SOLUTION FOR LEBANON, AND THAT SYRIA HAD ANY FURTHER IDEAS, SHIHABI REVEALED THAT WHILE IN BEIRUT HE HAD PERSONALLY INVITED LUCIEN DAHDAH TO VISIT DAMASCUS FOR MORE DETAILED DISCUSSIONS. DAHDAH ARRIVED HERE DECEMBER 21 AND REMAINED UNTIL MORNING DECEMBER 23, ON VISIT BRACKETING THAT OF PRIMIN KARAME. SHIHABI SAID THE SYRIANS HAD FOR THE FIRST TIME PRESENTED SOME DETAILED IDEAS ABOUT THE COMPROMISES BOTH SIDES WOULD HAVE TO MAKE IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE A CEASE FIRE AND LAUNCH THE PROCESS OF POLITICAL REFORM. SHIHABI WAS NOT WILLING TO DESCRIBE THESE DETAILS AND SAID ONLY THEY WERE MORE PRECISE THAN THOSE DISCUSSED WITH KARAME HERE. ASKED WHY HE HAD SELECTED DAHDAH TO RECEIVE SUCH A MESSAGE. SHIHABI SAID IT WAS BECAUSE OF DAHDAH'S CLOSE RELATIONS WITH FRANGIEH. WHILE NOT OPTIMISTIC THAT FRANGIEH WAS CAPABLE OF ALTERING HIS OUTLOOK, SYRIANS WISHED TO MAKE THIS MAJOR

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EFFORT THROUGH A MAN WHO SERVED BOTH AS ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL COUNSELOR TO THE PRESIDENT AND ALSO HAD FAMILY TIES WITH THE FRANGIEHS.

4. SHIHABI THEN REFERRED TO HIS EARLIER CONVERSATION WITH ME ABOUT HIS CONCERN OVER GAINS BEING REGISTERED BY LEBANESE COMMUNISTS IN PRESENT DISORGANIZED STATE OF LEBANESE POLITICAL STRUCTURE. SAID THAT HIS

REPORTS INDICATED HIGH LEVEL OF CPL ACTIVITY, BOTH WITH THE CHRISTIAN AND MUSLIM COMMUNITIES, BUT IN PARTICULAR WITH MUSLIM, PUSHING THE LINE THAT THE CPL WAS THE MOST CONSISTENT SUPPORTER OF POLITICAL REFORM. SHIHABI SAID HE WAS PARTICULARLY UNEASY ABOUT REPORTS THAT THE PARTY HAS ACTIVATED ITS FOLLOWERS IN THE LEBANESE SCHOOL SYSTEM AND WAS IN POSITION TO INFLUENCE LEBANESE YOUTH, AND INFLUENCE WHICH CONTINUATION OF PRESENT DISORDER COULD ONLY ENHANCE.
MURPHY

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